AIR WAR COLLEGE

RESEARCH REPORT

AIR FORCE OFFICER COHESION

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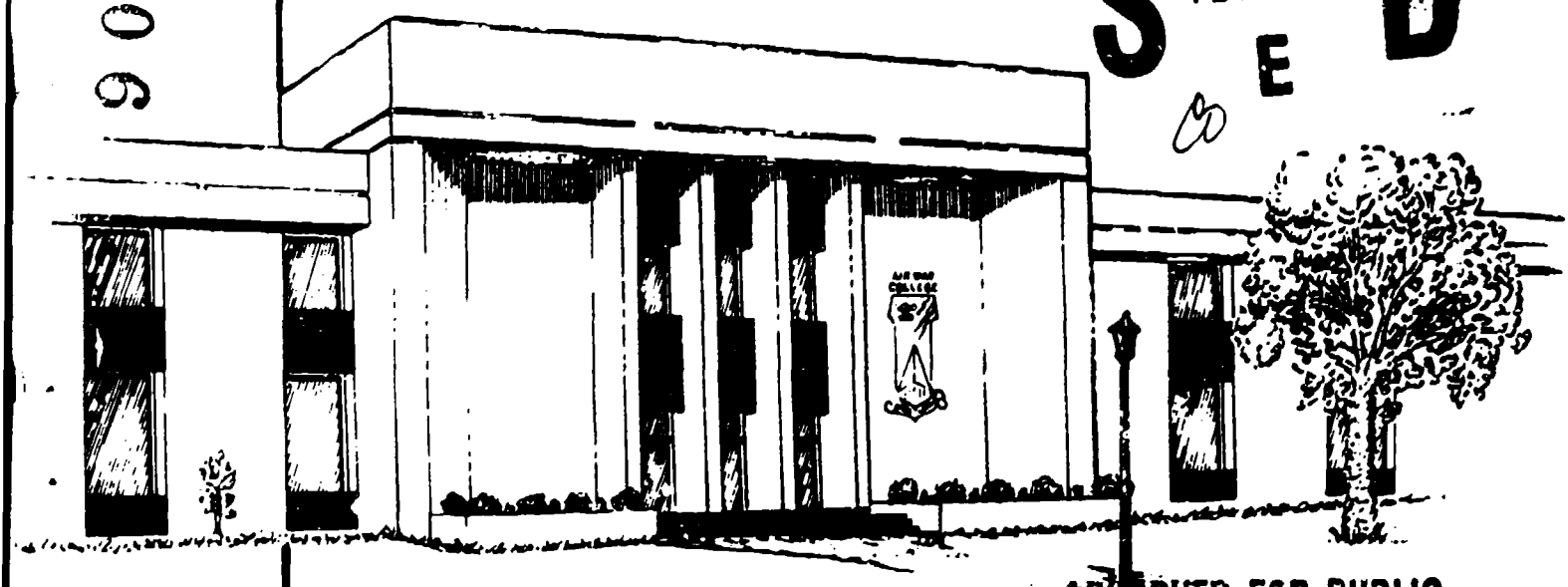

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AIR WAR COLLEGE
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AIR FORCE OFFICER COHESION

by

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A DEFENSE ANALYTICAL STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Dr. Bart Michelson

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Air Force Officer Cohesion

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Defines and distinguishes cohesion as a psychosocial condition apart from esprit de corps, elan, and morale, and delineates three component dimensions of cohesion. The selected dimensions discussed are: the moral commitment of officers toward military service; the quality of leadership within the officer corps; and, the sense of corporateness among Air Force officers. Also establishes why cohesion is important to military organizations. Excerpting from available research, data measuring the level of cohesion's three dimensions within the Air Force officer corps are used to assess the corps' overall level of cohesion. The conclusion drawn from those data is Air Force officer cohesion has room for improvement. Strategies and initiatives to improve cohesion are suggested.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Peter N. Blaufarb (M.Ed., Mansfield State University, Pennsylvania) has served in morale, welfare, and recreation, social actions, and personnel. From 1978-1983, he served as a human resources development staff officer and Chief, Legislative Affairs Section within the Directorate of Personnel Plans, Headquarters, USAF. He is a 1984 distinguished graduate of the Air Command and Staff College. Following ACSC, he was assigned to Headquarters, Strategic Air Command where he served as Deputy Chief, Officer Assignments Division and Executive Officer, Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel from 1984-1988. Lieutenant Colonel Blaufarb is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1989.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The level of cohesion among Air Force officers could be higher. This asertion is based primarily on the findings of selected studies on officer professionalism which include measures of the component dimensions of cohesion. As this study reveals, room exists for improvement along several of those dimensions. It also suggests initiatives and strategies for strengthening these dimensions within the Air Force officer corps and, hopefully, thereby improving the corps' cohesion.

In order to reach those recommendations, we must first understand the concept of cohesion and why it is particularly important to a military organization. The study begins, therefore, by defining military cohesion and differentiating it from the similar, but different psychosocial conditions of esprit de corps, elan, and morale. It continues by taking a closer look at some of cohesion's component dimensions. To be sure, cohesion within any group or organization is a complex phenomenon dependent on many variables. However, this study concentrates on three: the sense of moral commitment Air Force officers have toward military service; the quality of leadership within the Air Force, particularly at senior levels; and, the sense of corporateness shared by Air Force officers. These dimensions were chosen from among the many components of cohesion because they

repeatedly emerge as critical elements in the literature on the subject.

Another interesting aspect of these three dimensions is they are not only variables that contribute to the development of group cohesion, they are themselves characteristics of cohesive groups. That is to say, within cohesive groups you will find members whose service is motivated by a desire to achieve a higher good, leaders who demonstrate constructive leadership behaviors and are perceived as concerned and competent by the membership, and members who share a high sense of unity or oneness. In turn, cohesive groups are also characterized by positive behaviors such as high performance, productivity, efficiency, and teamwork. For obvious reasons, particularly when under combat conditions, all these characteristics are essential to the success of military organizations. Especially today, as technology and other factors increasingly influence the composition of military organizations, the lethality of weapons, the degree of interpersonal relations, and the complexion of the battlefield, the level of a group's cohesion may very well prove to be the key ingredient for victory.

Moving from that introduction of cohesion, the third chapter looks more closely at moral commitment, leadership and corporateness within the Air Force officer corps. Although these dimensions are examined individually, they are not independent or mutually exclusive variables. In fact,

the contrary is true. However, since no psychometrically weighted instrument has been administered to the Air Force officer corps solely to measure their level of cohesion, this study had to rely on excerpts from related research that happened to include measurements of cohesion's component dimensions.

On the surface, that data reveal an Air Force officer corps that is ambivalent about its commitment toward military service, less than fully confident in its senior leadership, and divergent in its sense of unity.* Among the indicators supporting these conclusions is the finding that although a majority of officers felt a sense of commitment to serve which transcended personal welfare, only a minority believed their behavior or the behavior of their peers was consistent with their sense of commitment. Another indicator found a majority of majors attending the Air Command and Staff College had felt pressure from senior officers or "the organization" to compromise their integrity. Finally, a majority of officers more closely identified with groups other than the Air Force officer corps. Each of these indicators relate respectively to moral commitment, leadership, and corporateness. These and many other indicators are reported and interpreted in more detail in the second chapter.

It is important to emphasize at this juncture that the findings of this study are in no way intended to denigrate, deride, or besmurch the professionalism and

dedication of Air Force officers. Rather, it is intended to reasonably substantiate the contention that cohesion within the Air Force officer corps, as a group, is not as strong as it might be. And, if it were higher, the Air Force would benefit by way of increased productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, teamwork, and, possibly, increased officer retention.

For these reasons, the final portion of this study recommends a number of initiatives and strategies to improve officer cohesion. It is believed that each recommendation, on its own, would have a positive affect on cohesion. What is not known, however, is how much more cohesion is enough or if cohesion within the Air Force officer corps will ever exceed a certain level. These are significant unknowns, but cohesion is such an important positive force within military organizations that we should not be dissuaded by them from actively seeking new ways to develop as cohesive an officer corps as possible.

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*It must be mentioned that these data were collected in the early 1980s, after the military had endured a decade of declining public esteem, deteriorating quality of life for its members, and resource neglect. Also, there had recently been a mass exodus of pilots which, no doubt, negatively influenced member attitudes toward the Air Force. However, parallels exist today. For the past several years military

pay has been capped, slowly eroding officer pay purchasing power. Reductions in Appropriated Fund support to morale, welfare, and recreation programs also effect the quality of life by causing reductions in the institutional support system provided members. The quality of medical care provided by the services is increasingly viewed by military members as substandard or inadequate. And once again, pilots are exiting the service in large numbers. Moreover, the captains and majors surveyed in the early 1980s and who stayed in the Air Force are today's majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels. These and other conditions suggest the data collected in the early 1980s may still accurately reflect the attitudes of today's officer corps.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF COHESION

Military historians and sociologists have long explored the phenomena that bind groups of individuals into effective fighting forces, capable of withstanding the most arduous and deadly of circumstances in order to accomplish a given objective. For the most part, terms such as esprit de corps, elan, and morale have been used to describe the forces and conditions that help hold these groups together. More recently, in our post-mortem of the Vietnam war, military researchers and writers, particularly those studying the Army, began to refer increasingly to cohesion rather than to morale and the like.

As with so much terminology, one might view the change in terms as cosmetic. If we look closely at these terms, however, we can see cohesion, indeed, represents a different concept than esprit, elan, or morale.

Whether we define esprit de corps, elan, or morale, we find concepts that are surprisingly similar to, but different than cohesion. Each implies enthusiasm, vigor, dedication, spirit, or devotion felt by an individual toward a cause or goal. It is these feelings that unite the individual to others of the same disposition. In his study of the human element in combat, William D. Henderson addressed esprit, elan, and morale by saying "Various analysts have emphasized these terms differently, but they have all

tended to refer to the motivation of the individual soldier as part of a group." (1:3-4)

On the other hand, cohesion addresses the bonding of individuals from a different perspective and probably is best expressed by the National Defense University (NDU) definition. In a 1984 study entitled Cohesion in the U.S. Military, NDU researchers defined military cohesion as the "... the bonding together of members of a unit or organization in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission." (2:ix) Unlike esprit, elan, and morale, which suggest the individual bonds or identifies with the group because of feelings commonly held by each, military cohesion infers the group or organization, as an entity, can produce an internal environment that by itself bonds members.

Richard A. Gabriel and Paul A. Savage amplify the internal environmental nature of military cohesion in their work Crisis in Command, saying:

> Conventional historians and ... political and social commentators believe that military units maintain cohesion ... because of external behavioral reinforcers such as patriotism, a tradition of militarism (Sparta, Rome, Prussia), ideological beliefs, and, possibly, aristocratically derived imperialism. Some contemporary military sociologists find other explanations to account for cohesion ... [,however,] ... the strength or weakness of a military structure is, by and large, a function of conditions generated within the military structure itself. (3:32-33)

As with the NDU definition of military cohesion, the Gabriel

and Savage opinion presents military cohesion as a phenomenon resulting from certain motivating internal group conditions which produce strong interpersonal bonds among group members. In contrast, esprit, elan, and morale are characterized by collective, but individually held sentiments that are influenced largely by external factors.

All this serves to define and distinguish military cohesion from esprit, elan, and morale. And, accepting that distinction, we can look more closely at military cohesion to see if specific internal conditions or motivators can be identified which produce a high degree of cohesion. A number of authorities, most of whom address military cohesion at the small-unit (i.e., squad, platoon, company) level within the Army, have analyzed cohesion and enumerate specific conditions and motivators they believe characterize cohesive groups and which cultivate high levels of cohesion. What follows, therefore, is an overview of the most prominent cohesion-producing characteristics reported.

A MORAL COMMITMENT TO THE MILITARY

A cohesive group is characterized by a membership that is morally committed to the military. This moral commitment is based on the memberships' "internalized values and norms of the military and ... [sensitivity] to social sanctions of other members of the corps" (2:43) for the sake of achieving a higher good.

Put another way, moral commitment is characterized

by the members' willingness to conform to certain standards of behavior. These standards may be formal in the sense of policies, procedures, and regulations, or informal as with understandings of expected conduct. Conformity to formal standards includes something as simple as willing compliance with grooming and appearance standards, even when away from the group. Likewise, conformity to informal standards includes membership in the officers' club or Air Force Association. The extent to which members conform to these standards, reflects the degree of their cohesion.

Another element of moral commitment is the sensitivity of group members to social sanctions. These sanctions take the form of principles or rules of expected conduct. Violation of sanctions results in penalties enforced by the group, whereas compliance produces esteem, affection, and prestige. Within the military community, and the Air Force officer corps specifically, these sanctions include, but certainly are not limited to such things as promotion, specialty skill awards, decorations, and assignment to select or coveted billets. One last thought regarding social sanctions is that members' sensitivities to them must be widespread; they need to run both vertically (up and down the ranks) and horizontally (across primary groups). In the case of the Air Force officer corps it is hard to define what comprises a primary group, although it is generally thought to consist of those who work in the same unit. (2:1)

LEADERSHIP

A second characteristic of cohesive groups and an element that helps develop cohesion is good leadership. Among others, John W. Blades discusses the high correlation between good leadership and healthy group cohesion.(4:80-81) Presumably, our understanding and familiarity with the concept of leadership is more thorough than with the abstract concept of "moral commitment." Therefore, rather than define leadership, it would be best to review some basic leadership characteristics that directly influence cohesion.

In this construct we need to view leadership from two directions--leader behaviors and perceptions of that behavior. From the first vantage point, we find leaders of cohesive groups tend to establish and effectively communicate a high level of expected performance from the group. Once done, they insist those standards are met and take appropriate and prudent measures to ensure standard accomplishment. The net affect of this behavior is that members of the group are normally drawn together to meet the standard or accomplish the objective.

Another leadership characteristic vital to cohesion development and sustainment is the level of motivation displayed by the leader. Certainly, if a leader is going to insist on a group working hard to achieve high performance standards, he or she must be willing to work equally hard, if

not more so. What we have here, then, is a case of leadership by example. A highly motivated leader is more likely than not to inspire followers to achieve high standards of performance.

The element of leadership depends on more than just standard setting and hard work, however. Healthy perceptions of the leader and the manner in which the leadership function is performed are also essential to cohesion. In particular, group member perceptions of how well the leader is performing and how competent he or she is directly affect intra-group relations and harmony. An example of this aspect of leadership is portrayed in this account of cohesion among German soldiers who had endured incredible hardships during World War I:

> German battlefield cohesion resulted directly from the individual soldier's personal reinforcement due to interactions through which he received esteem and respect from his primary group - squad, platoon, and company - and to his perception of his immediate officers and NCOs as men of honor eminently deserving of respect and who cared for their men. (3:34)

Likewise, the extent to which a leader seeks group member opinions on how to achieve a task or an objective will influence group cohesion. In cases where opinions are sought, group cohesion tends to be high; where they are not, group cohesion tends to be lower.

In sum, leadership that favorably influences cohesion is an amalgam of setting and enforcing high standards, demon-

strating a high degree of leader motivation, being perceived favorably by subordinates predicated on leader competence, and enfranchising group members into the decision making process. (4:80-82) Leadership, together with the moral commitment of the membership, account for two of the three predominent elements of cohesion. The final element is corporateness.

CORPORATENESS

In his work The Soldier and the State, Samuel P. Huntington cites the sense of corporateness among military officers as a characteristic of professionalism. As he defines it, officer corporateness is:

> ... a sense of organic unity and consciousness of themselves as a group apart from layman. This collective sense has its origins in the lengthy discipline and training necessary for professional competence, the common bond of work, and the sharing of a unique social responsibility. The sense of unity manifests itself in a professional organization which formalizes and applies the standards of professional competence and establishes and enforces the standards of professional responsibility. (5:10)

Although Huntington's discussion of corporateness is a part of his overall thesis that military officers comprise a profession, on its own, corporateness lends itself very well to the understanding of cohesion.

Corporateness has many dimensions. Surveys designed to measure officer professionalism and cohesion have measured such dimensions as: officer agreement on the professional qualities of integrity, standards of behavior, and commit-

ment; differentiation between their personal and professional behaviors; and the degree of personal identification with the officer corps. Interestingly, the NDU study contained a battery of questions intended to measure officers' professional orientations. Many of the questions in this battery addressed elements that could easily be included under the heading of corporateness. For example, it surveyed the sense of teamwork within the officer corps, support of the officers' club, the value of military rituals, traditions, and symbols, and the level of differentiation by officers between military and civilian social roles.

The point that needs to be made, however, is that whether scrutinizing professionalism, professional orientation, or cohesion, the dimensions of unity, common bonding, and the sharing of unique responsibilities come into play. These elements are the precursors of corporateness. Like moral commitment and leadership, corporateness, in its own right, contributes additional dimensions to the study and understanding of cohesion.

The preceding discussion served to distinguish cohesion from similar, but different concepts and to illuminate some of its essential qualitative characteristics. By itself, that discussion gives us only an inkling that cohesion is an important ingredient in determining military effectiveness. However, whether in peace or in combat, the degree of a group's cohesion directly influences the level of its pro-

ductivity and the quality of its performance.

Within cohesive groups we find members displaying behaviors that include "... cooperative support, mutual assistance, organizational coordination, and teamwork in accomplishing the common task." (4:76) The absence of alienation, fragmentation, and functional self-interest or "territorialism," means cohesive groups present healthy, cooperative environments which encourage members to perform and produce to the maximum extent of their abilities. In fact, one might say a cohesive group nurtures the success of its members and, thereby, strengthens its own cohesiveness. The positive working relationships that develop within a cohesive group, as a result of its internal cooperative nature, encourage individuals to join the group, stay with it, and make "... more efficient use of group assets such as ability, time, and equipment." (4:76) The outcome being an efficient, productive organization.

The degree of cohesion needed within an organization to make it successful, however, may vary based on the level of teamwork and commitment required of its members to accomplish a mission. (2:8) Therefore, when compared to peacetime operations, the success of an organization in combat will demand a higher level of cohesion. One of the first to articulate the value of cohesion to victory in combat was the Frenchman, Ardant du Picq. In a summary of Ardant du Picq's writings, which were the product of du Picq's extensive study

of military history and personal combat experience in the Crimean War, Major Mitchell M. Zais of the Army's Command and General Staff College says:

> Cohesion is important, not because it makes soldiers and leaders feel good about one another, but because it is a prerequisite to fighting spirit... [it] imparts to the soldier a desire to support his comrades in danger and can partially compensate for the effects of fear. (6:60)

More succinctly, but equally to the point, Brigadier General John H. Johns, USA (Ret), stated, "Military cohesion is perhaps the most critical factor in combat success." (2:viii)

It is no coincidence, therefore, that a focus on military cohesion followed the end of our involvement in Vietnam. As the war dragged on, men fought the war amid waning popular support, increasing racial tensions, eroding confidence in both military and civilian leadership, and the growing frustration of elusive victory. Other debilitating forces also affected our troops. Still, our armed forces fought effectively with only few and isolated cases of unit disintegration. The research suggests a major factor in sustaining the effectiveness of our fighting units in Vietnam was cohesion.

Not surprisingly, either, is the fact that nearly all of the works reviewed on cohesion use the Army as its subject and study the dynamics of cohesion within the small unit (i.e. squad, platoon, and company). The NDU study does a fine job of analyzing cohesion and goes so far as to measure dimensions of cohesion within the Air Force officer corps.

The reported dimensions are limited, however, and the survey applied only to field grade officers. Nonetheless, other studies on professionalism and military sociological models, such as Dr. Charles Moskos' Institution--Occupation model, do contain measurements relevant to assessing the level of cohesion within the Air Force officer corps. Notwithstanding the absence of a complete data base upon which to assess Air Force officer cohesion, these related studies provide a variety of valid and reliable data upon which to base inferentially sound conclusions.

The following chapters will report conclusions about Air Force officer cohesion based on the data provided by those studies and recommend some strategies to improve cohesion along dimensions that were found lacking.

CHAPTER III

ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF AIR FORCE OFFICER COHESION

The preceding chapter discussed the distinction between cohesion and other psychosocial concepts that are related, but different than cohesion. Going further, the discussion covered three elemental dimensions of cohesive groups, they being moral commitment, leadership, and corporateness. The contention certainly is not that these are the only dimensions of cohesive groups. Rather, it is that these particular dimensions are frequently referenced in group cohesion studies and they establish, within limits, dimensions along which we can attempt to measure or assess the level of a group's cohesiveness. With these parameters in mind, we will now attempt to assess the state of each dimension within the Air Force officer corps and, based on these assessments, attempt to describe the overall level of cohesion among Air Force officers.

MORAL COMMITMENT

In his study of the military, Dr. Charles C. Moskos, Jr., describes three concepts of military social organization. The first he labels a "calling," and is defined as a "Pure moral commitment where the values and norms of the military are internalized by the officer, and the military purpose transcends personal welfare." The second concept is "institution," which is an organization whose membership is based on normative controls (psychological and social sanc-

tions, internalized norms and values, and peer pressure); it is legitimated in terms of values and norms that define a purpose transcending individual self-interest in favor of a higher good. In its purest sense, according to Moskos, an "institution" is comprised of members whose affiliation with the organization is motivated by a sense of "calling" (moral commitment). "Occupation" is the third of Moskos' concepts and is defined as a organization whose membership is based on remunerative controls; it is legitimated in terms of the marketplace, and the relationship is contractual. (2:5-6) Members who are occupationally oriented are motivated by monetary rewards in exchange for the services or skills they render. These concepts and their definitions are important to assessing the level of moral commitment among Air Force officers because so much of the data related to moral commitment has been collected using the Moskos "Institution--Occupation" model.

As a case in point, (then) Major Carolyn A. Bonen used the Moskos concepts to measure professional attitudes of Air Force officers attending the three resident Professional Military Education programs at Air University (Squadron Officer School--SOS; Air Command and Staff College--ACSC; and Air War College--AWC) during academic year 1981. In one array of questions, officers were asked to report how they perceived themselves, other officers, and the "ideal" officer with regard to military service being a "calling,"

"profession," or an "occupation." Bonen found a majority of respondents felt a "calling" to serve the nation as a motivation for their military service. However, only a fraction of SOS (13%), ACSC (22%), and AWC (29%) respondents reported actually behaving as though they had a deep personal commitment. Moreover, only 5-10% of the groups believed other Air Force officers behaved as if their service was motivated by a "calling." In addition, a small but significant number of respondents identified themselves as occupationally motivated (SOS 14%; ACSC 14%; and AWC 10%).

Bonen's findings suggest that while the sense of moral commitment ("calling") among Air Force officers is reasonably high, there is a divergence between that sense and their behaviors. Along the same lines, about 30% of the respondents felt their peers were occupationally oriented. From these findings, one could surmize most Air Force officers subscribe to the concept of moral commitment, but neither their behavior nor their perceptions of their peers' behaviors manifest that commitment. (7:7-9)

Data reported in 1980 by (then) Captain James H. Slagle, who surveyed professional attitudes of SOS students, appear to be consistent with Bonen's findings. Working from a premise that officers may see their service as motivated by several elements simultaneously, Slagle asked his respondents to describe their motivation by apportionment between institutional, neutral, and occupational motivations. That is, a

respondent could define his or herself as 50% institutionally motivated, 20% neutral, and 30% occupationally motivated (in each case, the respondent's apportionments had to equal 100%). Slagle then went on to divide his respondents into functional groups, including "operations" (pilots, navigators, missileers) and "support" (administration, personnel, security police, etc.). The operators reported themselves 10% occupationally oriented and 30% institutionally oriented. Support officers reported themselves as 5% occupationally oriented and 49% institutionally oriented. Surprisingly, a large number of both groups, 61% operations and 47% support, reported themselves as neutral, or having no inclination one way or the other. (8:95) While that ambivalence (neutrality) may be partially attributable to their relatively short tenure in the Air Force, when combined with their level of institutional motivation, a picture emerges of officers who are only moderately morally committed to the Air Force.

To take a closer look at Air Force officer moral commitment, we need to focus more closely on the components of moral commitment--conformity (behaviors and attitudes) and sensitivity to social sanctions (principles or influences that make a rule of conduct). In assessing the levels of these components, the NDU survey is especially useful. That survey contained 24 questions lumped under the broad measurement heading of "Professional Orientation." All those questions speak to conformity and social sanctions, but ten ap-

pear to exemplify those components. The ten questions include:

> Military personnel should perform their duty regardless of personal family consequences?
>
> No one should be forced to accept an assignment against his or her will?
>
> What I do in my private life should be of no concern to my supervisor or commander?
>
> Military rituals, traditions, and symbols are no longer important in today's highly technical military environment?
>
> Differences in rank should not be important after duty hours?
>
> Personal interests and desires must take second place to military requirements?
>
> Compensation should be based on proficiency instead of rank and seniority?
>
> I have a deep personal commitment, a "calling" to serve the Nation?
>
> All officers should actively support the officers' club?
>
> What I do during my "off-duty" hours is none of my service's business? (2:51-52)

The survey was administered to field grade officers (majors through colonel) of each of the services and asked them to respond to these questions by assessing their personal orientation and the professional orientation of their respective service.

Results of the survey indicate that officers within the services having a high technological character, that is the Air Force and the Navy as compared to the Army and Marine Corps, tended to be more occupationally oriented. Likewise,

these officers perceived their services as leaning toward occupationalism versus institutionalism. Among the respondents, Air Force officers reported the highest degree of divergence from the institutional model with regard to perception of their service's orientation. Of particular concern to the researchers, based on the scale used, was the finding that all but Marine Corps officer orientations approached the neutral point (a rating of 3 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing traditional institutional values).

Because there is no similar data previously collected, one cannot judge whether Air Force officer professional orientation is drifting toward or away from traditional institutional values. What can be gleaned from these findings, however, is that among service officers, Air Force officers tend to have a lower personal sense of institutional values and perceive their service as less institutionally oriented than do officers of other services. Insofar as this portion of the survey measured professional orientation, using questions that assessed levels of conformity and sensitivity to military social sanctions, it would be fair to say that among service officers, Air Force officers tend to have a lower degree of conformity and sensitivity to military social sanctions.

These sample data reveal two things about Air Force officers. First, a good number (about half according to Bonen) are <u>motivated</u> to serve by a sense of "calling" (moral

commitment), but their behaviors are not generally consistent with their sense of commitment. Moreover, a vast majority see their fellow officers' service motivated by something other than a "calling." Second, the level of Air Force officer conformity to traditional institutional norms and values, and their sensitivity to military social sanctions (professional orientation) are somewhat lower than that of officers in other services. Overall, these data depict an officer corps that is ambivalent regarding its moral commitment toward military service.

LEADERSHIP

Quality of leadership is another prominent characteristic affecting the level of Air Force officer cohesion. In evaluating the quality or effectiveness of leadership, the two principle aspects are sound leadership behaviors and the perceptions of subordinates. While much has been written on leadership and its characteristics, little data were found that measured either the quality of Air Force officer leadership behaviors or subordinate perceptions of their superior officers. Nevertheless, there are bits and pieces of data that portray, to some extent, both of these aspects.

In most discussions of leadership, integrity is cited as a quintessential characteristic. Sound leadership, therefore, is eroded if not demolished by a lapse or lack of basic honesty. And, as integrity waxes and wanes, so goes a leader's trustworthiness and subordinates' faith in the leader.

The result of faulty leader integrity is unit or organizational disintegration; member confidence in its leadership is diminished and so is the level of group cohesion. For these reasons, assessments of our leaderships' integrity is relevant to assessing cohesion among Air Force officers.

In a 1974 survey of SOS students, for example, respondents reported a lack of faith in the integrity of Air Force leadership. A majority, 61%, felt they were required to sacrifice their integrity in order to satisfy job requirements. (9:96) A 1980 survey of majors attending ACSC, conducted by Majors Joseph R. Daskevich and Paul A Nafziger, also found officers felt pressured to compromise their integrity. In response to the question, "Were you ever pressured by the 'organization or senior officers' to compromise your integrity?," a majority (52%) reported having been pressured sometimes or often (35% reported being pressured rarely and 13% reported never being pressured). These same officers were asked, "How frequently do you think other officers compromise their integrity?" A vast majority (80%) felt their fellow officers compromised their integrity either sometimes or often (20% felt their fellow officers rarely compromised their integrity and none felt their fellows never compromised). (10:14)

Bonen's 1981 study surveyed a larger group of officers, spanning the grades captain through colonel, and found less extreme, but similar results. When asked about organi-

zational or senior officer pressure to compromise their integrity, 32% of the SOS, 65.5% of the ACSC, and 37% of the AWC students reported having been pressured either sometimes or often. The response of ACSC students is particularly startling in that roughly seven of every ten officers had felt pressure to compromise their integrity.(7:26)

The integrity issue also arose in surveys of officers separating from the Air Force. Today, as ten years ago, the Air Force is confronted with a mass exodus of pilots. In an effort to understand why these officers leave the service and to develop constructive retention strategies, the Air Force has made extensive use of pilot surveys. An interesting finding of a 1979 pilot exit survey related to the integrity of Air Force leadership. The survey found, among other causative factors, that pilots who were separating from the service were disillusioned with their leadership, beginning at the wing level and extending to the highest levels of the Air Force. "Many separating pilots view senior officers as self-centered individuals more concerned with promotions and 'looking good' than with mission-essential items or force readiness." (11:23) Not only does this finding express an unfavorable opinion among exiting pilots toward Air Force leadership, it also assails by implication the competence of that leadership.

The perceptions of exiting pilots and other officers today seem not to have changed from those of their peers ten

years ago. In both a 1987 and 1988 New Directions Survey, conducted by the Measurements Division at the Air Force Military Personnel Center and administered to all separating officers, the data reveal decreasing levels of satisfaction with leaders and supervisors as one goes up the chain of command. Incidentally, the same trend emerged in the 1987 and 1988 Careers Survey administered to more than 600 officers who indicated they intended to make the Air Force a career.

Other measurements of officer perceptions of service leadership are contained in the NDU study. Although this study did not report the frequency of Air Force officer responses to all the questions and statements related to this dimension, the few they did report provide additional insights into officer perceptions of service leadership. Among the frequencies reported were Air Force officer responses to statements such as: My service takes care of its own; My service is very interested in the welfare of its people; and, The chain-of-command allows decisions to be made at a level where the most adequate information is available.

The NDU report tells us a majority of officers (52.7%) agreed the Air Force takes care of its own; however, the remainder were either ambivalent (neutral) or disagreed with the statement. These officers were more positive toward the Air Force's interest in the welfare of its people, however. Among the respondents, a larger majority (67.2%) agreed the Air Force is concerned about its members' welfare.

(2:87) On balance, these results suggest officers generally believe service leadership wants to take care of its people, but in reality, the perception is leadership either is incapable of, or kept from, fulfilling those expectations.

Another characteristic of healthy leadership is the willingness of leaders to allow decisions to be made at the lowest appropriate level. In effect, by decentralizing decisionmaking, leadership demonstrates a confidence in the competence and trustworthiness of subordinate officers. That expression of trust, in turn, helps motivate subordinate officers to exercise and hone their leadership skills and nurtures confidence in their own abilities. The NDU research suggests decentralization of decisionmaking may not be fully exploited by our senior leadership. When given the statement, "The chain-of-command allows decisions to be made at a level where the most adequate information is available," only 29% agreed, 48% disagreed, and 23% were ambivalent (neutral). (2:87)

This review calls upon only a narrow band of indicators to assess leadership behaviors and perceptions of leadership. Nonetheless, they illuminate some areas of concern with regard to the quality of leadership and, by consequence, the level of officer cohesion. The data reported individual officer integrity is occassionally compromised as a result of external pressures eminating from either senior officers or the "organization." It also reported that among separat-

ing officers, as well as officers choosing to make the Air Force a career, the perception is the quality of leadership at levels above the squadron (small unit) could be better. Furthermore, while officers see leadership as interested in member welfare, it does not fully actualize that sentiment. And, there is the perception senior leadership does not allow officers to fully exercise their authority by retaining decisionmaking at inappropriately high levels.

These findings lend themselves to an inferential conclusion that Air Force officers are largely divided in their opinions on the professional health and competence of their senior leaders. Although speaking in terms of the small unit, perhaps the following statement by Jon W. Blades summarizes best the nexus between leadership and group cohesion:

> When the members felt their boss was doing his job well, group cohesion was high. In groups where the members felt their leader was doing a poor job, cohesion was low. As one might guess, when members feel their boss is competent, the leader and his subordinates will have a good working relationship because the members believe that the leader's talents will ensure good unit performance. ... people want to be part of a winning team. On the other hand, when members feel their boss is incompetent, unit cohesion will be lower because the members lack confidence in their leader's ability to do his job right and to produce performance. This feeling will erode the working relationships between them and their boss. (4:80-81)

CORPORATENESS

Corporateness, like the other dimensions already reviewed, has specific components. Drawing on Huntington's definition, in particular, the most significant determinant

of corporateness among officers is a sense of unity predicated on a belief they are a "group apart from laymen." (5:10) That sense of unity can be measured in several ways, including how strongly officers identify (share a feeling of "oneness or sameness") with the officer corps as a whole and how willing they are to affiliate themselves with professional associations and social organizations. If Air Force officers are truly a cohesive group, one would logically expect their sense of unity and, in turn, their level of corporateness to be high.

Frank R. Wood has done extensive research on the changing professional identity, commitment, prestige, and level of civilianization (convergence with civilian norms and values) among Air Force junior officers. Among his many findings, he reports young Air Force officers identify more strongly with officers within their specialty (pilot, engineer, personnel, etc.) and with civilian counterparts who possess like skills (pilot to commercial pilot, security policeman to civil police, etc.), than they do with their fellow officers in different specialties. (12:70-71)

Comments of young officers interviewed by Wood attest to this fragmentation within the officer corps. As one lieutenant in civil engineers said:

> There seems to be a large split between support and flying side. ... We have two different chains of command and not a whole lot in common as far as work goes. We can't seem to relate and it seems to be fostered by the Air Force. (13:485)

Along a similar vein, Wood found that young pilots tended to see themselves as "professional pilots" who just happened to be "flying for the government." (12:65) Of the entire sample of officers, including respondents from operations and support fields, almost half (42%) thought of themselves as specialists working for the Air Force as opposed to thinking of themselves as military officers. As an interesting aside, over twice as many flying officers (55.8%) identified themselves as specialists than did support officers (25.6%). (12:65)

Wood attributes this phenomenon of specialty identification to several factors, among them: different chains of command for operations and support officers; increasing application of technology which erodes the lines of demarcation between military and civilian roles and functions; the increasing isolation between operations and support officers due to different duty requirements and work schedules; and, the channelized energies of young officers to master their specialties with little opportunity to learn and appreciate the roles and responsibilities of officers in other specialties. Nonetheless, whatever the contributing factors, the sense of corporateness among these young officers, as evidenced by their level of identification with the officer corps as a whole, appears to be weak.

Wood's research focused on junior officers with less than ten years of commissioned service (captains and lieuten-

ants). Therefore, an obvious question follows; Do more senior officers also share a similar divergent identity from the officer corps? Daskevich's study is helpful here because it surveyed majors and asked them to report on the group with which they most closely identified themselves. As with Wood's study, Daskevich found a minority (25%) holding a primary identity with the officer corps. The remainder cited people in their career field (32%), people in their unit or workplace (37%), or none of the above (6%). Furthermore, two-thirds of the respondents considered themslves specialists (having worked primarily in one or two career fields) versus generalists (having had considerable experience in three or more career fields). (10:35)

Additional indicators of shared identity among Air Force officers are membership in professional associations and social organizations. Along these lines, Daskevich found a majority (61%) of officers belonged to the Air Force Association (AFA). However, a little more than a third (37%) said they would join the officers' club if it truly were a "free choice decision" (49% said it would <u>depend</u> on location and club program, and 14% said they probably wouldn't join). What we must keep in mind is, unlike the captains, these majors are not only committed to an Air Force career, they are among that small group of "top performers" selected to attend resident professional military education. Notwithstanding those credentials, two of five officers chose not to

belong to one of the Air Force's preeminent professional associations and only about one of three would freely join the officers' club. (10:43)

Bonen's survey along these lines revealed similar findings, as well as trends correlating to grade. For example, as the grade groupings of respondents increased from lieutenant/captain (SOS student), to major (ACSC student), to lieutenant colonel/colonel (AWC student), the respondents primary identity with the officer corps increased from 17.8%, to 31.6%, to 40.6%, respectively. Likewise, so did membership in the AFA and a willing membership in the officers' club. (7:27-35) Even with the increasingly favorable responses reported as officer grade increased, the level of identity among the most senior officers appeared to be only moderate. The AWC data show three of five officers do not indentify primarily with the officer corps, one of five does not join the AFA (the most favorable statistic), and three of five would either definitely or probably join the officers' club if it truly were a free choice.

One might have expected the sense of corporateness, as measured by identification with the officer corps, to be higher than the data show. In fact, it might well have been rated higher were it not for several circumstances that directly affect corporateness. For one, the Air Force is divided into major air commands which have specialized missions and officers may find they have more in common with their

command colleagues than they do with officers in other commands. Along these lines, operations officers tend to spend the majority of their careers in a particular major command due to mission specialization, whereas support officers will migrate among commmands to best fill overall Air Force requirements. Under this personnel management scheme, its understandable that a bomber pilot may view himself as a Strategic Air Command (SAC) resource. One the other hand, a finance officer may be partial to SAC because of current or past assignments within the command, but view himself as an Air Force resource because he may be assigned to any command that needs his skill and grade.

Another circumstance affecting the level of corporateness is the increasing application of technology which demands higher degrees of specialized skills among officers and draws them closer to the private sector. For example, officers working in areas of research and development or systems acquisition do not normally work in military organizations structured along traditional lines and they directly interact with scientists, technologists, and engineers in private industry. Convergence with civilians is not only limited to the "high tech" corners of the Air Force. In many organizations Air Force civilian employees are highly visible and hold senior positions. Their presence greatly contributes to the mission by virtue of their skill and experience. However, civilianization within military organizations can

also contribute to the dilution of military officer identity.

There are many other realities influencing officer corporateness, but two remaining factors should be mentioned. Years ago the military was comprised largely of unmarried personnel (enlisted), most if not all lived on the installation, and the location of the installation was relatively isolated. The all-volunteer force and larger numbers of married members, improved pay, urban and suburban development, and easy access to private transportation have all contributed to larger numbers of officers living off the installation in the civilian community. In that setting officers find themselves taking on extra-military roles and responsibilities that may contribute to the fragmentation of their identity. Finally, some officers may sense a higher degree of prestige attached to their specialty (e.g., engineer), both in the civilian and military spheres, than they sense is attached to their position as an Air Force officer. These and other "real world" factors affect the level of officer corporateness and, to varying degrees, most likely influenced the findings of the referenced research.

CONCLUSION

Cohesion is a powerful force which strengthens the sense of teamwork among group members, increases group mission performance and productivity, and improves the general health or quality of life within the group. "Historically, cohesion among groups of people has been crucial to an

effective U.S. military organization," (2:9) and this is no less true for the Air Force officer corps.

Studies of cohesive groups have identified several internal group indicators of cohesion which, if developed to their highest capacity, will help increase levels of group cohesion. Among these indicators, or internal group conditions, are: the sense of moral commitment shared by the members toward the organization; the quality of leadership within the organization; and, the degree to which the members feel a sense of corporateness. Other indicators exist, but these three appear to be among the most significant. Inasmuch as the Air Force officer corps represents a definable group, the degree of their cohesiveness may be judged by assessing the levels of those indicators within the group.

To date, a discrete study of Air Force officer cohesion has not been undertaken. The most notable study, that done by NDU, measured officer cohesion across the Department of Defense and reported only limited data along individual service lines. Measurement data, therefore, were gleaned from studies on officer professionalism and related subjects. The findings depict an officer corps that is ambivalent about its moral commitment to military service and which is critical, albeit not antagonistic, toward its leadership. Nor do officers share a high level of identity with the entire corps. This translates into a cloudy sense of corporateness among Air Force officers. Along each of these

dimensions, as a group, Air Force officers tend to deviate from values, norms, and behaviors generally associated with a traditional military institution. This is not to say, however, that when it comes to cohesion the Air Force officer corps is the "sick man of DOD."

As the NDU researchers point out, different organizations require different levels of cohesion to accomplish their mission. The factors mentioned in the discussion of officer corporateness, plus many others, militate against Air Force officers having a level of cohesion equal to, or greater than, say, the Marine Corps or Army. Consequently, the data reported in this analysis should be viewed not as a condemnation of Air Force officer cohesion, but rather as substantiation of a contention that we can do better when it comes to officer cohesion. What follows, therefore, are recommendations that may serve the Air Force well in strengthening cohesion among its officers.

CHAPTER IV

INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE COHESION

Cohesion is a powerful psychosocial force of great importance to military organizations which can be developed and nurtured, in part, by prudent leadership policies, practices, and procedures. The earlier discussions on leadership alluded to a few examples of cohesion-building practices, but that only scratches the surface; the possibilities are endless. In fact, one could say the only limit to cohesion-building strategies is the imagination and motivation of leadership.

What follows is a discussion of four broad areas in which modified approaches to current Air Force policies and procedures might help improve officer cohesion. While they are based on the earlier findings of this study, they are not scientifically substantiated. Rather, they are intended to be thought provoking and demonstrate how various aspects of our institution may be approached with an eye toward enhancing cohesion. The four areas discussed are: institutionalizing cohesion-mindedness among our leaders; modifying officer recruitment to better identify candidates with desired officership and leadership qualities; improving officer bonding through common experiences; and strengthening unit cohesion by extending commander tour lengths.

It should also be noted that the areas discussed exclude recent officer professional development initiatives

relating to professional military education, the officer evaluation system, and assignment policies. These initiatives are consistent with cohesion building and represent what senior leadership can accomplish if, among other things, there is a desire to strengthen the officer corps.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF COHESION

Among its several recommendations for improving military cohesion, the NDU study suggests the military departments examine existing and new policies to determine their affects on cohesion and specific staff offices be established to perform that function. The thrust of these recommendations is sound, but they would do little to "institutionalize" the cohesion-mindedness of our senior leaders and policy makers. In fact, such initiatives would most likely serve to "bureaucratize" rather than institutionalize cohesion-mindedness.

Making cohesion the specialty of a staff function means its advocates would have to grapple with the political and bureaucratic forces that play within the headquarters arena. Cohesion-related staffs, programs, and initiatives would have to survive budget and manpower cuts when dollars are scarse. On the other hand, if cohesion-mindedness were adopted and internalized by our senior leaders, their decisions and guidance would inherently support officer and Air Force cohesion. The question, then, is how can military leaders be brought to internalize a sensitivity for cohesion?

A good starting point would be a comprehensive study of cohesion within the Air Force and among its officers, in particular. This study attempted only to assess the level of cohesion within the Air Force officer corps, but many questions have been left unanswered and aspects of the issue unexplored. A complete analysis of cohesion within the Air Force, however, should include a indepth career life-cycle study along with an assessment of psychosocial forces that influence individual and organizational behaviors. At this point one can only speculate on the findings, but more likely than not, they would substantiate the importance and correlation of cohesion to efficiency, productivity, and warfighting ability. These findings would help justify cohesion-oriented policies and programs in the face of budgetary scrutiny and influence the mindsets of our senior leaders.

For that reason, an Air Force cohesion study should be undertaken and its findings incorporated into the curricula of all the officer accession and professional military education programs. In this way, by drawing attention to the importance of cohesion and methods for its development during each phase of officer indoctrination, we might be able to ensure that leader behaviors, guidance, and decisions are influenced by a sensitivity to cohesion.

RECRUITMENT

Regardless of the officer commissioning program--USAFA, ROTC, or OTS--the primary selection criterion has been

and remains aptitude. In part, the value placed on aptitude serves to build a bright, intelligent officer corps. This is particularly true when entrance competition is keen and the Air Force can afford to select from among only the very best qualified applicants. The quest for high aptitude candidates also has a practical rationale. Those with sufficiently high aptitudes are more likely to successfully complete technical training programs such as pilot and navigator training. Low wash-out rates mean more productive and cost efficient training.

Naturally, as the Air Force has grown more technically-oriented and complex, the demand for higher aptitude candidates has increased. For example, recruitment standards for OTS include a college academic grade point average of 3.0 or more (on a 4.0 scale) and an Air Force Officer Qualification Test (AFOQT) score of 80 and above. Moreover, preferred applicants have academic degrees in the sciences and technologies. But does all this emphasis on aptitude identify candidates with the stongest leadership qualities, team-building skills, and propensities to be professional officers?

Part of that question is answered by the fact the Air Force uses other selection criteria, along with aptitude, to assess a candidates personal and behavioral qualities. Applicants to all commissioning programs must be recommended by responsible individuals who attest to the applicants' morale

character and other personal qualities. Well rounded applicants are also noted by their participation in outside or extra-curricular activities such as athletics and service organizations. Moreover, each commissioning program permits observation of candidates over extended periods and under rigorous conditions. While these subjective selection elements enhance the reliability of the officer selection process, they are not without their flaws.

Personal recommendations are usually solicited from individuals who already have favorable impressions of an applicant, but who may not know what qualities the individual must possess to be a successful military officer. Similar shortcomings apply to extra-curricular activity involvement. For example, an applicant may well belong to several organizations, but neither take an active nor leadership role in any. Finally, once an applicant enters a precommissioning program, the program's focus is on ensuring the candidate successfully completes the regimen and is commissioned, rather than weeding out weak or marginally performing candidates. These flaws notwithstanding, the combination of aptitude and subjective evaluations have essentially served the Air Force well and stocked it with quality officers. Still, the question persists whether the selection process can be improved and thereby better identify applicants with the strongest leadership and officership qualities?

In fact, the Air Staff has asked that question re-

cently and is examining ways to improve the officer selection process to better identify officership and leadership qualities among applicants. In addition, the Air Force Human Resources Laboratory is examining the AFOQT to see if elements of that instrument correlate to officership qualities. Their findings could have a significant impact on recruitment standards inasmuch as more weight might be given to the officership correlative elements of the AFOQT. Such weighting would allow applicants who might otherwise fall short on a purely aptitude scale to gain commissioning program entry on the value of their officership qualities. Also, within the Air Training Command a working group dubbed the Oaks Commission is trying to assess what makes an individual stay in the Air Force. All these efforts suggest personality and behavioral characteristics are receiving more recognition in the officer selection and retention process as important success determinants.

All that brings us to the recommendation that personality characteristics should be an important part of officer candidate selection, even to the point of partially discounting aptitude scores in favor of highly desired personality characteristics. Afterall, an aptitude score hardly reveals the level of an individuals dedication and determination. Put another way, most of us have observed instances where perseverance by a person of less aptitude produced greater results than the efforts of a "brighter" individual.

Therefore, if we are looking for smart officer candidates with high senses of commitment, dedication, and teamwork, and who possess the wherewithal to be fine military officers, then perhaps we should amend our selection criteria so that it no longer is so heavily skewed toward aptitude and the science and technology academic specialties. We just may find that our "Aim High" motto has led us to aim too high aptitudinally and caused us to bypass many who would be fine officers.

COMMON EXPERIENCE: TRAINING AND ADDITIONAL DUTIES

Among the several findings reported in this study, one of the most interesting dealt with the level of corporateness within the officer corps. Whereas one might expect officers to view themselves primarily as members of the larger officer corps and secondarily as functional experts, just the opposite was true. There are many contributing factors to this phenomenon. Among those factors are the forces of specialization inherent in a large technological bureaucracy and the marketplace predisposition of remuneration by skill (e.g. medical pro pay, engineer and aviation bonuses, etc.) believed necessary to sustain an all-volunteer force. Nonetheless, cohesion-building initiatives can help the Air Force develop corporateness within the officer corps despite those factors. If successful, a more strongly bonded corps would not only work more efficiently and productively, but might likely produce higher

retention rates.

One idea for building officer corporateness would be a graduate officer training program (GOT) that all officers attend after commissioning, but before technical training such as undergraduate pilot training or aircraft maintenance officer school. As it stands now, officers are normally commissioned via three markedly different programs--Reserve Officer Training Corps, Officer Training School, and the Air Force Academy. After commissioning they normally go on to a functional training program before arriving at their first permanent duty station. Consequently, from the time young men and women enter commissioning programs until they assume duties at their first duty station, they travel increasingly channelized paths. However, a common training experience, perhaps in the form of a GOT, conducted at either one or more sites, would serve to enhance their Air Force officer-mindedness and heighten a sense of oneness among Air Force officers.

The core of the GOT would be a mentally and physically rigorous program centered around unit (student squadrons) competition. In effect, it would be an experiential learning laboratory for the development of officership skills. Academics would also include the study of each functional specialty and the role it plays in the overall accomplishment of the Air Force mission to help create a broad-based sense of teamwork. But the demanding and

physically rigorous routine would serve as the basis for skill development and officer bonding. Each of the commissioning programs today offers these elements and circumstances in their own way. However, there is no single indoctrination experience that all officers can point to as a common officer frame of reference. Interestingly, both the Army and the Marine Corps conduct such courses for their officers, regardless of the branch or specialty in which they ultimately serve.

One other recommendation might also help strengthen officer cohesion and it relates to additional duties. Not long ago, the Air Force eliminated a large number of perfunctory additional duties and relieved operations officers, aviators in particular, from the burden of performing those additional duties that did not relate directly to their flying duties. The elimination of meaningless duties makes good sense and will help improve morale and productivity. However, anecdotal information suggests that the exemption of operators from many additional duties was undertaken primarily because aviators viewed additional duties as irrelevant to their primary duties, were given too much emphasis in distinguishing who received higher indorsements on efficiency reports, and demanded too much time over and above their primary duties. Inasmuch as they constituted a career irritant and pilot retention was on the decline, it seemed appropriate to make additional duty adjustments. As a result, aviators

and missileers have had many additional duty requirements deleted. Responsibility for many of the remaining additional duties now falls to the squadron adjutant or has been passed to other support officers.

Unfortunately, this thrust has four serious flaws. On the first count, it validates the specialist mindset which holds that all an officer owes the Air Force is performance of his or her primary duties. Second, reduction or elimination of additional duties further isolates operations officers from the support world. What little interaction these duties offered operations officers with base administration, personnel, security police, supply, transportation, etc., has just about been eliminated. Third, exemption of operations officers from additional duties deprives them of practical knowledge of support activities that would serve them well as they assume command positions. Finally, additional duties normally provide officers staff skill development opportunities. By their exemption, therefore, operations officers have fewer chances to develop writing, organizing, and staff coordination skills early in their careers. While these skills are often disparaged by warriors, they are nonetheless essential to success in assignments above the squadron level. So, while elimination of unnecessary additional duties makes good sense, exemption of operations officers from many of those that remain does little to further their professional development or foster officer corporateness. For these rea-

sons, the Air Force should rethink its position regarding operations officers and additional duties.

COMMANDER TOURS

The officer corps has two critical functions relative to cohesion building. It provides leadership to the primary groups (squadrons, groups, wings) and integrates and links primary groups to the larger military institution. (2:xiii) Unfortunately, our assignment policies, which in large part are tied to a concept of life-cycle career development, may be inadvertently obstructing the development of strong primary group leadership. A look at squadron commander assignments illustrates the question: Are we giving squadrons commanders, or are we giving commanders squadrons?

Without a doubt, command of a squadron is a significant career achievement and a highly coveted billet. For those reasons, most major air commands manage the selection of their squadron commanders by a selection board process where candidates are evaluated and ranked in order of merit based on the quality of their military records. Wing commanders, in consultation with higher echelon commanders, select their commanders from this board list. In those cases where commanders are not selected by a formal board process, candidate records are closely scrutinized by the respective functional community (e.g. supply, maintenance, security police, etc.), personal references are obtained, and the gaining commanders (numbered air force and wing commander) also

review the candidate's credentials before the assignment is approved. This rigorous commander screening process, whether by selection board or vested interest party review, reveals the importance placed on the quality of squadron leadership and why command of a squadron is seen as validation of an officer's quality relative to his or her peers. There are ways in which the process can be improved, but generally speaking, the system identifies excellent candidates for command. The relationship of cohesion building to command, however, does not entirely rest with who is selected to command, as much as it rests with who is selected and how long they serve in the command billet.

In the Strategic Air Command, for example, commanders of operational squadrons normally serve about 18 months before reassignment. In some cases, an officer can assume and relinquish command without having to undergo examination by an inspector general team or perform under an operational readiness inspection. One other drawback with short command tours is some commanders do not serve long enough to be held accountable for their decisions or indecisions. In some cases, problems are left for the successor to handle and for which he or she may be held accountable. As for the squadron, members may view the commander as a visitor, just passing through the chair enroute to bigger things. It is almost reminiscent of the Lone Ranger television program, when townsfolk, watching the Lone Ranger and Tanto ride off into

the sunset, asked "who was that masked man?" No doubt squadron members know who the squadron commander is, but a commander's short tenure does not necessarily provide sufficient time to build a cohesive unit or permit the commander ample opportunity to develop to the maximum his or her leadership skills. As Charles Cotton observed in his article "Institution Building in the All-Volunteer Force," "... instability at the unit level ... reduces unit cohesion and alienates those led from their leaders, especially in combat units." (14:47)

A solution to this condition is not easily applied because there are few operational squadrons in comparison to the number of officers qualified to assume command. Moreover, the window of opportunity to command for these officers is very narrow, normally two-to-three years while in grade as a lieutenant colonel. Some find command opportunities outside the operations world, where command tenures incidentally are longer--normally 24-to-36 months. However, this alienates qualified support officers who see the influx of operations officers into their career fields as constraining their opportunities to assume unit command.

Obviously, there is no easy solution if we view this issue purely from a personnel management perspective. However, if we are concerned with maximizing leadership experience of our future senior leaders and, more importantly, increasing the level of unit cohesion, we should minimize unit

leadership instability by holding squadron commander tours to at least 24 months.

SUMMARY

Hopefully, this cursory review of four broad areas relating to the Air Force officer corps demonstrates that many of our current institutional policies and programs are predicated on sound management principles. But strengthening officer cohesion, regrettably, does not appear to be among those fundamental principles. In fact, when these areas are reevaluated using cohesion building as an objective, their form, construct, or rationale is markedly altered. More importantly, modification of current Air Force programs, policies, and procedures aimed at improving officer cohesion may very well produce a more strongly bonded officer corps that more closely identifies with traditional military values and provides even better leadership.

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